

INFORMATION IN DEPTH ON A SINGLE TIMELY
SUBJECT.

By

Louise Kimbrough et al

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CLOSE-UP

Information in Depth on A Single Timely Subject

In this issue the subject is a unique research project devoted to the exploration of inner space.

The material was gathered by Louise Kimbrough and prepared for publication by B.T. Kimbrough and Paula Oto.

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Hypnosis plays a part in many professions today. Some dentists and physicians use it as drugless anesthesia for tooth extractions and other minor surgery. Law enforcement officials and attorneys have hypnotized accident victims and witnesses to violent crimes to make them recall the exact sequence of traumatic events.

In the 18th century, Franz Anton Mesmer, whose name has become a synonym for hypnosis, believed that the planets could influence the course of disease. As a doctor, his treatment was to transfer a magnetic flux from his body to that of his patient--known as "the Mesmeric pass." His beliefs won wide acceptance in Europe and he became a very successful physician. One of Mesmer's historically important patients was Maria Theresa von Paradis, a blind girl in her early teens. Maria was such a fine pianist that she captured the attention of Mozart, who wrote a concerto for her, and she became a protegee of the Empress of Austria. Maria supported her family comfortably on her generous pension from the Empress, but her parents took her to Dr. Mesmer for treatment of her blindness. He cured her, and she fell from grace as the brilliant blind pianist at court. Her furious parents literally beat down Mesmer's door, accusing him

BF 1128

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of taking undue liberties with their daughter. The real problem was that as an ordinary sighted girl who played the piano well, her pension and her family's livelihood were threatened.

In the past few years, Paul Palmer, a professional hypnotist, and his associate, Dr. James Parejko, an instructor at Chicago State University, have been using hypnosis for some interesting research. Through a technique called "regression," Palmer or Dr. Parejko, suggest that the entranced subject reexperience things he or she could not possibly remember consciously--events which took place in the first three months of life, or even earlier. Palmer and Parejko did not develop regression. It has been used for decades by psychiatric therapists, but they have used this technique in an original way. Their work with blind and sighted subjects has led them into some intriguing speculation about religion and reincarnation and about what it means to "see" and not to see.

With Louise Kimbrough, Jim Parejko, a skeptical scientist who holds a Ph.D. in philosophy, discussed how his interest in hypnosis began.

"I once read a book that claimed hypnosis could cure cancer. Now THAT may not be true, but it was an interesting notion. So when I got all my work finished for my doctorate, I learned to hypnotize people. Then I read a report describing how hypnosis could produce stories of previous existences, such as the Bridie Murphy case. Regression can be of two types: to any period in a person's immediate past, or to a previous life.

"Not long ago one of our college professors became suspicious of her maid, believing that the maid was going to steal, or had stolen, things from her home. She didn't want to blame the woman until she was certain,

so she hid some gold earrings worth a good deal of money. Then she couldn't remember where she hid them, and she was hypnotized to help her recall. Adoptees, who have not seen their natural parents since infancy, sometimes want to go back to find out what they looked like. If we hypnotize people who came from another country, say, France or Poland, they speak French or Polish when they are regressed. If we take a person back to fifth grade, that person will write, talk, and think like a fifth grader."

As a professional hypnotist, Paul Palmer's job is to perform the induction: that is, to place the subject in a trance and deliver the carefully worded hypnotic suggestions. These instructions must be repeated as the trance is induced so that the subject will not forget them as part of the short-term memory loss that sometimes accompanies hypnosis. He recently assisted an attorney whose client had been involved in a three-car hit and run accident.

"The woman I had to regress was the only witness who got a good look at what happened. She had seen the license plate and the car, but as time went on, she could not recall those details. I hypnotized her and made her go through the incident from the beginning. She was able to recall the license plate and thoroughly described not only the car, but the driver."

The literature on hypnotic age regressions goes back over a hundred years, including claims of regressions to former lives. Palmer and Parejko have been experimenting with regression for several years and found that their subjects spontaneously spoke of previous existences. They have written several articles on their discoveries, including one entitled, "A Boy Named Michael" which appeared in the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF HYPNOSIS.

They also did a study at Chicago State University which was published in the same journal entitled "A Hundred Cases of Reincarnation?" Students at the university who participated in the study were hypnotized in two sessions. In the first, they were hypnotized to see what kind of subjects they'd make and what techniques to use. Then, 92 of them were actually regressed and gave information that seemed to come from previous lives.

Palmer and Parejko became interested in regressing blind people as a result of publicity they received in the NATIONAL ENQUIRER. Dr. Parejko reasoned that if they regressed people who had literally never seen anything in their lives, and if these subjects spoke as if they were seeing things, the concept of the existence of previous lives would automatically gain credibility.

They established a pilot study using six subjects who understood the purpose of the experiment. Since that time, Palmer and Parejko have continued sampling new subjects, until they now have hypnotized thirty people in connection with this research.

With a sighted person, once the trance has been induced, a typical past life regression results in a large amount of visual recall. "I see this tree, and I see some people over there by the tree, and they're dressed kind of funny." The subject then typically describes what is occurring as it unfolds, and more visual detail is added. "Now I see a cabin over there by the tree."

With blind subjects, Paul Palmer used the same type of induction he uses with sighted people. "I always tell subjects to close their eyes in my technique anyway, so I was on very much the same ground with blind people."

Once regressed, the blind subjects often reported as though they were sighted, describing things they would not have normally known--a window up in the corner of a room, for example, or birds flying. One man was surprised

and pleased at the ease with which he was able to move around the room without his cane. Many subjects were also surprised at how the information was coming to them, since it was clearly neither tactile nor auditory. A few subjects were uneasy with this new source of sensory input.

Of course, it is possible that blind subjects may be reporting things that have been described to them by other people. But first-hand information for blind people is primarily available through touch and sound, and under hypnosis, they initially describe what they feel and hear. But after awhile they begin to make statements like "The clothes are dirty."

Dr. Parejko commented, "What an unusual statement for a blind person--how would THEY know the clothes are dirty? The words they use move toward the visual and away from the tactile and auditory. We are told about 'see-through' plastic, for example. Of course, some people do have light perception--which could explain Paul's example about a 'window way up there.' But overall it is very odd that people who have never seen anything in their lives tell us about roofs and houses, about objects at a distance, and about things located behind other things."

Not all the blind subjects in the project reported previous existences as sighted people--some seem to have been blind (or partially sighted) in a previous life as well.

"One blind subject," Dr. Parejko recalled, "described running through a field, frequently using the words 'wet' and 'cold,' all tactile sensations. Obviously this person was also blind in that life. In other cases, though, subjects have definitely shown a perceptual ability they don't have in this world. They even say, 'Hey, look at all I can see!' Blind people are a rich source

of information because of all the variations in visual ability. To my knowledge, however, we have never had a sighted subject regress to a blind previous life.

"One partially sighted subject in a past life regression described a ship at sea in Australia. He described people getting off this boat and said things like, 'Boy, they sure don't look good; they're not very happy.' Afterwards he felt that under hypnosis he had seen far better than he's ever seen in his entire life. He had always been curious about how things look to people with 20/20 vision, and when hypnotized, he found out."

Palmer and Parejko recalled a statement made by a blind girl in the study, who said that the thing she missed most was not being able to see what she looked like. "We know, of course, that when a blind person says, 'I see it, I see it,' that really means many things, including 'I understand' or 'I heard you,' and doesn't mean that they are really seeing. So we tried to be very careful in our questioning, but often what we got was plainly visual. 'I see a lady over there in the corner, and she's playing the piano. She's got blond hair bouncing all over. She's wearing this big dress that doesn't fit her at all--why is she wearing that big dress?' At the very least, it's a journey into the subject's subconscious. For most people, that's an intriguing reward in itself."

Parejko and Palmer make no other definite claims about their work and admit that any hypnotic subject might unwittingly embellish his report. Even if, for instance, a person really did live in a period where he fought in a war, using a musket, he may also have seen movies about this period as well. As he begins describing his life, associations from the movies may cloud his perception of what really occurred. Dr. Parejko is

quick to point out that the human mind has many levels, and hypnosis may release both truth and fiction at the same time. Even with no way to be certain of the absolute truth of the reports, however, it is remarkable that the subjects reported their previous lives in such a similar way.

Paul Palmer has become increasingly certain that the phenomenon released by hypnosis goes far beyond normal imagination. "It's surprising, but we have yet to find a subject who is putting historical facts in a grossly wrong context. If you're in the Civil War, for instance, you would see a house from that era. There certainly won't be a Volkswagen in the driveway or a TV antenna protruding from the roof."

To see how much conscious imagination might distort a subject's report, Dr. Parejko asks people to imagine a previous life.

"Almost invariably, when we ask a blind subject to imagine their previous life, we draw a total blank--they just can't do it. If we prompt sighted people to do the same thing, they're only slightly better. Their accounts are very bland--'I'm on my horse, I'm in Virginia, I'm taking a ride.'

"That's NOT what we get under hypnosis, which truly goes beyond imagination. In the trance state, the person is perplexed by what he receives and is reacting to something happening TO him. From the subject's point of view, it's literally the difference between telling a story and listening to a story. When you're telling a story, you know what comes next. When these people are in a past life regression, the story happens to them.

"There's no doubt in my mind that anyone can tell the difference between a person making up something with his conscious mind and someone undergoing hypnosis.



Most people are truly surprised and intrigued by what comes out in the trance. One of our blind subjects exclaimed, 'I never knew I had THAT inside me.' I like to be alert to my own dreams, and I've used self-hypnosis to keep myself a participant in them. When I think of the very strange dreams I have, I'm personally amazed that those things are inside of ME."

To further differentiate between what comes from the subject's imagination and what is real, Dr. Parejko recalled a story he had read about a man who underwent an operation at age 55 and began to see for the first time in his life.

"Looking out the window of his hospital room, he saw the moon for the first time in his life. He was frightened because he didn't know what it was. This man surely had read books and heard popular songs--"Moon River" is one that comes to mind--describing the moon. Yet he was still frightened by what was outside his window. When this man saw the shovel he had once used in the garden, he understood the one part he had held in his hands--the handle. When it was turned upside down and backwards, he could not recognize that object as a shovel."

Of course, validating information received through regression is a problem with any hypnotic subject. If a subject reports a life in, for example, the 12th century, the hypnotist might ask for a description of the currency in use at that time and then look up 12th century currency in a book. The problem is that if the hypnotist could find it in a book, the subject might have also. But, as Dr. Parejko pointed out, he would be hard-pressed to accurately describe a dollar bill issued this year by the U.S. Treasury, but that would hardly fail to validate his present existence. He and Palmer have therefore focused their work on exploring the pheno-

mena of past lives recalled under hypnosis, studying what actually happens to their subjects without jumping to conclusions. Dr. Parejko doubts that, at this time, any completely fool-proof method exists to verify the concept of past lives. Paul Palmer agrees, but to satisfy his own curiosity has developed his own criteria--he looks for consistency in the subject's reports.

"As we expand our population, we see that the people give us the information in much the same ways."

Parejko and Palmer try to get the best report possible from a subject on the first try. Otherwise, they fear, subjects quickly become aware of the hypnotist's real intent in asking the questions he asks, and therefore produce the answers he is seeking, truthful or not. They have also done some longitudinal studies, in which they regress the same subjects numerous times in an attempt to get more information.

Many other researchers have also studied the past lives phenomenon, and have learned about something they call the cluster effect. If a grandfather in a family dies, for example, the next child born into the family is likely to be the reincarnation of Grandpa. In effect, he may come back as his own grandson or granddaughter. Blind people may come back as blind people with greater frequency as well, since many researchers believe that certain characteristics or patterns of behavior are carried from one life to the next, to be acted out again. By going back to previous existences, these patterns may be located and better understood. The famous seer Edgar Cayce was one practitioner who did "life readings" with that very theme in mind.

Paul Palmer has found in his own research that for many people just the process of being regressed is therapeutic in itself.

"We never thought to ourselves--or suggested to any of our research subjects--that just taking them back in regression would find the sources of their present illnesses or heal them. However, many subjects have told us after the regression that some old illnesses have suddenly disappeared. I recall one woman who had broken her ankle. Two years later, the ankle was fully healed, but the woman was still in constant pain. I did a regression on her, and two weeks later she reported that the pain was completely gone. That's hardly conclusive proof, of course, but the more regressions I've done, the more I've seen this happen. Over the last hundred years, many hypnotists have gone into private practice using age regression to bring about healings and to help people understand psychological quirks they may have which may be partly causing their illness." Clearly hypnosis can affect people in many different ways, depending on the viewpoint of the participant or the spectator.

Only about 20% of all hypnotic subjects recall absolutely nothing about what they said while in the trance. Another significant segment recall most of what they said, but some don't respond at all to the hypnotist's suggestions. Some who do not respond the first time may do better in subsequent sessions. Blind subjects are no different from other people in this regard.

"Blind people are a little more introspective, typically, than sighted subjects," Parejko says. "They are often experiencing a phenomenon that's all new to them, and since they're not touching it, or hearing it, they must be seeing it, which is very perplexing."

Paul Palmer felt the study gave him a new philosophical perspective on what sightedness means. "Blind subjects had to judge what they saw for the first time.

They were in a unique position, examining both sides-- which way is better? Which way offers a richer type of experience?"

Louise Kimbrough said, "What WE wish is that you would find out what kinds of perceptions need to be changed in sighted people--then hypnotize them all and help them be more accepting. Most people seem to be afraid of us."

"Speaking for the sighted population," Dr. Parejko answered, "We really don't know how to act. If you help a blind person, you're afraid of offending them. If you don't help, you think maybe you should have."

"If you saw a sighted person who needed help," Louise pointed out, "You'd just say, 'Hey, do you need help?' They'd say 'yes' or 'no.' But people are afraid of us, and obviously, hypnosis can do something about fear."

"Let me ask you something," Dr. Parejko responded. "What do YOU think this stuff we're doing can do for blind people? What rewards are there for the blind at large?"

"Everybody is so individual that's hard to say," Louise replied. "It would surely be of interest to someone who had never been able to see, and I hope it would help them put sight in perspective. We seem to have the tendency to totally undervalue sight at times. 'Who needs to see?' you decide, and then you go out looking awful because you're wearing a red tie and a green shirt."

"I do that all the time," Dr. Parejko teased.

"Yeah, you do, but if a blind man does it, they say, 'Oh, that poor thing. He doesn't know what he's doing.' To you, this may be irrelevant, but I think maybe this awareness could give blind people the concept

of what visual things really mean to people who can see. Then they could decide for themselves how important the visual really is. At least they would have more personal, first-hand awareness of what it is sighted people are always talking about.

"Sighted people are always telling you 'you should do this, you should do that.' The implication is 'If you could see you'd know better, and you'd do differently.'"

"Also, some blind people overvalue vision and think they just can't do certain things because they can't see. This so often is not true. Chances are, if they COULD see, they wouldn't even bother with those same things, or they might have other problems and distractions. We've been deeply conditioned by everyone around us to believe that being able to see is so much better. Surely if we could see, we sometimes think, we'd do all the things we want to do."

Parejko summed up his own feelings about his research. "At the very least, we do evoke visual imagery in blind people. That in itself enriches their perceptual world and make it more interesting, of course. But implicit in this thing is the notion of reincarnation. Even in the Bible, there are statements to indicate that we live many times. Some believe that the reason we live is to move to some level of spirituality. Karma is the name for the unfolding of the process whereby we move to this level. When you do good things, you move rapidly; when you do bad things, you move slowly. I'm not sure that theory is correct, however.

"In our work, we haven't picked up anything under hypnosis identifiable with karma. People tell us about ordinary day-by-day events, not kings and queens.

"My feeling is that maybe people DO live many times, but not for the reason of doing good or bad. They live to discover the unfolding of life as an esthetic experience. Maybe we have to live over and over again until, for example, I experience what it is to be blind--and you experience what it is to be sighted."

Parejko and Palmer are particularly interested in finding congenitally blind adults who are willing to help with their research. Nevertheless, they would welcome the interest of anyone with a visual impairment. Obviously, most of their subjects live in or near the Chicago area, but if you know well in advance that you will be visiting this area, you might be able to arrange for an appointment. To volunteer, write to: Dr. James Parejko, Department of Philosophy, Chicago State University, 95th & King Drive, Chicago, IL 60628, or telephone Paul Palmer at his business office at (312) 636-3671.



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